

Traffic Safety News & Facts For Employers December 2002 #3

- This week, NHTSA launched its national campaign, *You Drink & Drive. You Lose.* This year's campaign that runs from December 20th to January 5th will be the longest ever crackdown against drunk and drugged driving. In conjunction with this kickoff event in DC, NHTSA released the *State Alcohol Related Fatality Rates Report* (accessed at www.nhtsa.dot.gov) which documents the extent of alcohol-related fatalities in traffic crashes from 1982 to 2001 for every State, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. NHTSA estimates that in 2001, 17,488 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes, representing 41 percent of the 42,116 total traffic fatalities that year.
- Air-fed deer whistles, small plastic devices attached to car bumpers to scare deer from roadways, are "acoustically ineffective," according to research by the University of Connecticut. That is the finding of a scientific study conducted by Peter Scheifele, an animal bioacoustics and audiology expert at the University of Connecticut. On highways and byways across North America, nearly 750,000 collisions occur each year between deer and vehicles. Manufacturers promote deer whistles as "acoustic attention-getters", alleging deer will react to the whistle by remaining still. Scheifele's study found that the devices only put out a 12 kHz signal and the average deer can only hear 2-6 kHz.
- The Congressional Research Service has updated its report on legislative prospects for changes in the Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards (CAFE). In related news, the Bureau of National Affairs is reporting that the Administration will soon issue a proposed rule to raise the CAFE standard for SUV and light truck model years 2005-2007. For more information, visit <http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/02Dec/IB90122.pdf>.



- Voice recognition technology is not yet precise but it's showing up more often in new vehicle technologies. BMW, Mercedes, GM, Lincoln, Acura, Lexus, Infiniti, Audi, VW, Subaru and Isuzu have voice-command cell phones built in to their vehicles. Researcher Kelsey Group estimates U.S. companies will deploy voice systems to 32 million people, up 60% from 2001. Users of hands-free cell phone products are driving the demand for these voice technologies. As more states enact laws banning cell phone use in vehicles, the demand increases for hands-free and other system options. JD Power says over half of new vehicles sold in 2010 will have some sort of voice recognition system.
- A study published in the November issue of *Epidemiology*, found that lighter color vehicles are safer than darker colored ones. Researchers from the University of Granada in Spain reported that white and yellow cars have a 4% lower risk of being hit by other cars. These vehicles are more visible in the rain, fog or in other hazardous conditions. For further information, visit www.epidem.com.
- According to an article in the NY Times, the use of cell phones and laptops for conducting business transactions while driving can make companies liable if employees are involved in a car crash. Employees reaching for or answering their cell phone "as part of the job" can be held liable for crashes they cause. Although the law is "fuzzy" in regard to liability, precedents are being made against employers. Even if hands-free devices are being used, the law may not protect employers when a communications device has distracted employees while driving. Some employers have decided to prohibit employees from using cell phones to conduct business while driving in order to prevent lawsuits. For the archived article, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/03/technology/03CELL.html?ntem ail0>
- On December 4th, President Bush signed legislation requiring automakers to install lap/shoulder belts in the center rear seat of vehicles by 2005. By 2008, all new passenger vehicles will be required to have the rear seat belt system installed.

- Tired drivers involved in fatal crashes in New Jersey could serve up to 10 years in prison and be fined up to \$150,000 under legislation that cleared the state Senate on a 38-0 vote this week. The legislation, called "Maggie's Law," comes five years after the death of Margaret "Maggie" McDonnell by a young driver who had not slept in 30 hours preceding the crash. The driver, Michael Coleman, was acquitted of vehicular homicide after his lawyer successfully argued that fatigue was not specifically addressed in the existing statute. The jury was not allowed to consider Coleman's fatigue and he received a \$250 fine for careless driving. Maggie's mother, Carole McDonnell, who worked for the introduction of the bill that will be taken up by the Assembly early next year, recently spoke at NSF's National Summit to Prevent Drowsy Driving.
- The Transportation Research Board's Human Factors Workshops will be held in DC on January 12th, 2003 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The cost is \$ 125.00 for these small and interactive sessions. The workshops titles are:
 - Glare and Nighttime Roadway Visibility
 - Reaching 100%- Achieving Higher Belt Use Rates
 - How Pedestrians View Their Environment...and how Drivers View Pedestrians at Street Crossings and Intersections: Encouraging Pedestrian Movement through Effective Design
 - Applications, Benefits and Pitfalls of Naturalistic Data Collection
 - What is Safety Culture and How Can It be Improved
 - Newly Developed Fatigue Management Software Technologies for Transportation: A Hands-On Tutorial
 - Intersections: Crossroads to Safer Driving?
 - Maintaining Personal Mobility in Later Life: Putting the Pieces Together

- Variable Message Signs and their Use- Past, Present and Future

For more information visit

<http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/am/2003HumanFactors.pdf>. To register, visit the TRB website at www4.trb.org/trb/annual.nsf.

- Consumers show considerably more interest in new safety-related features than in entertainment, comfort or convenience features, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2002 U.S. Automotive Emerging Technologies Study(SM) released recently. On an annual basis, J.D. Power and Associates solicits consumer feedback on a select list of new and emerging automotive features to assist manufacturers in better understanding which features are most desired and how much value consumers place on each feature. Among the 25 features measured in the 2002 study, nine of the top 10 most desired features are designed to enhance vehicle or occupant safety. The low-tire-pressure monitor, an electronic sensing system that monitors the vehicle's tire pressure and alerts the driver when tire pressure is low and potentially unsafe, is the most popular feature measured.